

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT

8 April 1984

CENTRAL AMERICA/DONALDSON: The New York Times reports today that the U.S. AID Pentagon has begun drawing up contingency plans for the possible use of U.S. combat troops in Central America. The story stressed that the plans were being made just in case the present strategy fails in the region and would not be implemented in any case for a year or two, but the explosive political potential of that story caused the administration to quickly and flatly deny it. Mike von Fremd reports.

VON FREMD: Defense Secretary Weinberger on This Week with David Brinkley says it just isn't so. He insists the administration has no plan, no strategy and no thought on putting U.S. combat troops in Central America. CASPAR WEINBERGER (Secretary of Defense): There is no plan of that kind, nor is there any necessity for it.

VON FREMD: Weinberger also says the U.S. is not mining Nicaraguan harbors, even though numerous reports claim that is exactly what the U.S. is up to. But Weinberger qualifies that by refusing to discuss anything the CIA might be doing. Congress is now voicing increasing concern over U.S. military involvement in Central America, and The New York Times report seems certain to heighten that concern. The paper says the Reagan administration is drawing contingency plans for possible use of U.S. troops in Central America, should current strategy fail. In disclosing this, The Times says the administration is sending a signal to Congress to support current policy with money or be faced later with the possibility of having U.S. troops becoming directly involved, but Weinberger and others flatly deny all that. A senior White House aide today said the president has never requested any such contingency plans. And if any have been drafted, it has been done without Ronald Reagan's knowledge. The White House is especially sensitive to this story, because it raises once again the war monger image of President Reagan right in the middle of an election year, and administration officials are now doing all they can to put out the word that it just isn't true. Mike von Fremd, ABC News, the White House.

DONALDSON: Late today the State Department announced the United States will not accept the jurisdiction of the World Court in the Hague on any disputes involving Central America for the next two years. Officials said that action was taken because of the fear that Nicaragua might file a suit in the World Court, charging the U.S. with complicity in the mining of its harbors and other matters. U.S. officials said Nicaragua's purpose would be to use the World Court as a propaganda forum.